

Tú velas por los tuyos: Weak Labor Markets and the Importance of Social Networks

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Abstract Literature on the economic incorporation of immigrants to new destinations has been missing a discussion on how the strength of the local economy affects immigrants' need for social networks and how it might also affect the relative importance of strong versus weak ties for immigrant job seekers. Through the use of in-depth interviews, the role and importance of social networks in the labor market incorporation of Hispanic immigrants in economically weak cities is examined, as well as the consequences to those immigrants who are unable to command or lack access to social networks and/or ethnic resources. This paper contextualizes the importance of strong ties for immigrants in economically weak new destinations and argues that in places with such a constricted labor market and stagnant economies, it is imperative for recent arrivals to access and/or construct these strong ties in order to more effectively gain entry into the host society's labor market.

Keywords Social networks · Immigrants · New destinations · Labor market

Introduction

The incorporation of immigrants depends on a number of factors, such as the characteristics of the arriving group, context of reception, existence of a co-ethnic community that can aid in their incorporation, as well as the economic situation and local opportunities of the city in which immigrants are settling. In terms of their labor market incorporation, social networks are very important in determining immigrants' success and their importance cannot be overstated. The literature has demonstrated that in both traditional and new immigrant destinations, the exchange of information regarding employment opportunities that takes place within social networks is critical to the economic well-being of some immigrant groups, especially those with low levels of

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human capital (Light et al. 1999; Falcón 2007; Zúñiga and Hernández-León 2005; Massey et al. 1987; 2008; Menjivar 2000; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Waldinger 1997).

Despite the vast amount of literature in this area, very little research has looked at the role social networks play in immigrant destinations with a constricted labor market and weak economy (see Drever and Hoffmeister 2008 for a discussion on the role social networks play for immigrants settling in Germany during a time of job scarcity). As part of a broader examination of immigrant economic incorporation in economically weak new destinations, this article examines the need for and role that social networks play in immigrants' labor market incorporation. Through the use of in-depth interviews, I examine the cities of Newburgh and Poughkeepsie, two exurbs located approximately 70 miles north of New York City in the Mid-Hudson Valley, which, despite being economically depressed, have attracted a significant number of Hispanic immigrants in the past couple of years. Given the particular economic history and characteristics of each city, how are Hispanics being incorporated? More specifically, how does the strength of the local economy affect job-seeking immigrants' need for social networks? Does the strength of the local economy also affect the relative importance of strong versus weak ties to immigrant job seekers? What happens to those immigrants who are unable to command or lack access to social networks and/or ethnic resources?

This paper aims to contextualize the importance of strong ties for immigrants settling in economically weak cities. The literature on immigrant incorporation points out the importance of immigrants having access to both strong and weak ties; the former connects immigrants to initial labor market opportunities and can insulate them from labor market discrimination but removes them from non-ethnic labor market opportunities (Portes 1998), while the latter can help immigrants move up the occupational hierarchy and achieve socioeconomic mobility, but only if those network ties are vertical in nature (Granovetter 1983; Bourdieu 1986). Nonetheless, the literature appears to take for granted the availability of social networks without taking into consideration that not every immigrant has these resources readily available to them. I argue that in places with stagnant economies and a constricted labor market whereby there are fewer lower-level jobs opening up, it is imperative for recent arrivals to access and/or construct these strong ties in order to more effectively gain entry into the host society's labor market (see Ryan 2011).

The discussion begins with an examination of the cities of Newburgh and Poughkeepsie as new immigrant destinations that face structural challenges similar to other new destinations, albeit with the presence of a weak economic structure. I then move on to a discussion of the literature on social networks and its importance in the labor market incorporation of immigrants. The vast majority of that research is based on immigrants in traditional places of settlement and the research in new destinations focuses on places that have booming economies thanks to the restructuring of the economy in the USA during the 1990s (Massey and Capoferro 2008; Zúñiga and Hernández-León 2005). However, immigrants to Newburgh and Poughkeepsie face a different set of challenges when compared to their counterparts. I therefore examine the economic situation in both Newburgh and Poughkeepsie and how that might affect the need for social network ties, particularly strong network ties. I then utilize data from in-depth interviews with Hispanic immigrants in the cities of Newburgh and Poughkeepsie to assess the degree to which they rely on social networks for finding employment

and if these are strong or weak ties. The article concludes with the implications and contributions of the findings.

The Geography of New Immigrant Destinations

Recent research on immigration to the USA has begun to focus on the diffusion of immigrants to what researchers have denominated “new destinations,” areas beyond traditional gateway states and cities. These new immigrant destinations are overwhelmingly found in the south and midwest of the USA and are places that had, until recently, been undisturbed by contemporary immigration (Kochhar et al. 2005; Millard and Chapa 2004; Zúñiga and Hernandez-León 2005; Massey and Capoferro 2008; Marrow 2011). It should be noted, however, that research on new destinations has not looked into the settlement and incorporation of contemporary immigrants in smaller cities and towns within gateway states but outside the gateway metropolitan area. Although proximity to the gateway metropolitan area within the gateway state could potentially affect immigrant incorporation, the literature on new immigrant destinations captures the structural challenges that immigrants in Newburgh and Poughkeepsie are confronting.

Newburgh and Poughkeepsie are two small cities located at the northernmost edge of the Greater New York Consolidated Metropolitan area, with total populations of 28,866 and 32,736, respectively, according to Census 2010. The county where each city is located was a single county PMSA in 2000 and under the new metro area definitions they have been combined into the Poughkeepsie-Newburgh-Middletown, NY Metro Area. Basic demographic data for each city can be found in Table 1.

In addition to being about the same size, the cities also have similar median household incomes—\$35,350 in Newburgh and \$38,739 in Poughkeepsie, although they differ in terms of educational attainment. The population of Poughkeepsie is significantly better educated, no doubt a reflection of the one-time dominance of IBM in that city and surrounding areas. Approximately 35 % of Newburgh’s population does not have a high school diploma, compared to 23.4 % in Poughkeepsie, and the percentage with 4 years of college or more is also higher in Poughkeepsie compared to Newburgh (21.1 vs. 13.9 %).

In terms of migration, the patterns seen in Newburgh and Poughkeepsie are not necessarily a product of internal migration from New York City but rather the product of a direct migration pattern from their country of origin, which is in line with most findings on new immigrant destinations (Marrow 2013; Passel and Cohn 2009). Table 2 uses census data to show that in 1995, both Mexicans and other Hispanic/Latinos were most likely to be living in either Newburgh or Poughkeepsie. Of those who were someplace else in 1995, 16.3 % of the Mexicans in Newburgh and 29.4 % of those in Poughkeepsie were in a foreign country, as were approximately 14 and 17 % of the other Hispanics/Latinos in Newburgh and Poughkeepsie, respectively. In short, relatively few had lived elsewhere in the USA in the period immediately preceding the census. Those that had were more likely to have lived in New York State with the exception of Mexicans in Newburgh. Those who lived in another state differed by origin as well as location: Mexicans in Newburgh had previously lived in other states in the Northeast or the South, while those in Poughkeepsie hailed from other states in the

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of the cities of Newburgh and Poughkeepsie

	Newburgh	Poughkeepsie
Total population		
Census 1990	26,454	28,844
Census 2000	28,259	29,871
Census 2010	28,866	32,736
% Increase 1990–2010	9.1	13.5
Median household income in 2010	\$35,350	\$38,739
Educational attainment 2010		
% Without H.S. diploma	34.9	23.4
% With 4+ years College	13.9	21.1
Labor force		
% Unemployed		
1990	11.8	7.0
2000	11.3	8.2
2010	8.0	11.3
% Manufacturing		
1990	23.5	20.9
2000	18.7	10.3
2010	12.4	6.4
Foreign born population		
1990	3201	2878
2000	5742	4138
2010	6779	6537
% Increase 1990–2010	111.8	127.1
FB as % of city population	23.5	20.0

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 1990–2000 and ACS 2010

midwest or west. All the other Hispanic/Latinos in Poughkeepsie who had lived outside New York State had lived in the South, while those in Newburgh had lived everywhere but the South. Though we cannot from these data say specifically how many came from another part of the New York CMSA, it is clear that this is not the bulk of those who moved in the 5 years preceding the 2000 census, so the immigrants we are studying do not seem to represent a “diffusion” process from the gateway metro area outward. Moreover, the majority of immigrants in Newburgh and Poughkeepsie hail from Mexico—specifically the states of Puebla and Oaxaca—and have a high proportion of unauthorized immigrants, a finding that is consistent with the profile of immigrants in new destinations portrayed in the literature. Finally, and as a way of further contextualizing Newburgh and Poughkeepsie as new immigrant destinations, these cities initially lacked a critical mass of co-ethnics and ethnically oriented institutions—such as ESL classes, bilingual services at government agencies, etc.—to help them develop social networks and aid them in their initial adjustment, particularly in finding housing and employment.

Table 2 Prior residence for Mexicans and other Hispanics and Latinos, cities of Newburgh and Poughkeepsie

	Mexicans				Other Hispanic/Latino ^b			
	Newburgh	%	Poughkeepsie	%	Newburgh	%	Poughkeepsie	%
Total	3888		1240		2458		502	
Same house in 1995	1148	29.5	340	27.4	961	39.1	194	38.6
Different house, same MSA/PMSA in 1995	1949	50.1	393	31.7	878	35.7	119	23.7
Moved within same central city	1831		375		770		79	
Moved from remainder to central city	118		18		108		40	
Same state	54	1.4	78	6.3	217	8.8	94	18.7
Different state:	103	2.6	48	3.9	62	2.5	11	2.2
Northeast	8		0		29		0	
Midwest	0		24		0		0	
South	95		0		15		11	
West	0		24		18		0	
Foreign country or at sea	634	16.3	364	29.4	340	13.8	84	16.7
		100.0		98.6 ^a		100.0		100.0

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000; SF4. Combination of SF4 PCT 49 and PCT 50

^a Does not add to 100 because of 17 Mexicans who said they were in Puerto Rico in 1995

^b Other Hispanic or Latino does not include Puerto Ricans, who are US citizens by birth

The lack of the aforementioned institutional structures, combined with the smaller number of immigrants in these new destinations, is likely to change the mode of incorporation (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). Prior research has demonstrated the importance of social networks in immigration and initial settlement, and to the extent that the labor market is constricted and the occupational distribution confined in these new destinations, then social networks will be the key in helping immigrants secure employment (Donato et al. 2005; Massey et al. 1987; Menjivar 2000; Portes 1998). The places themselves may also have a history of declining populations, weakening industrial bases, and the economic problems accompanying them. With this in mind, immigrants may or may not be seen as a benefit to a city already in decline.

Social Networks and Employment

Social networks are an important element in explaining the processes of social and economic incorporation of immigrants. They are critical in influencing decisions to migrate as well as helping immigrants secure some of their basic necessities—such as housing, employment, transportation, etc.—upon arrival to the host society. In terms of

employment, social networks have been found to be integral in the labor market integration of immigrants, especially for Hispanic immigrants accessing jobs within the secondary labor market (Sanders, et al. 2002; Waldinger and Lichter 2003). In this sector, where jobs have high turnover rates, are characterized by instability and low wages, getting a foot through the door depends significantly on access to social networks and employer recruitment efforts.

Discussions have centered on the relative importance of strong versus weak ties in facilitating not just immigrants' economic incorporation but also their socioeconomic mobility (Sanders et al. 2002; Massey and Espinosa 1997; Massey et al. 1987). Social networks are categorized into strong network ties, which connect individuals of similar backgrounds such as family and friends, and weak network ties, which connect us with individuals who "move in circles different from our own" (Granovetter 1973). Within strong tie networks, job-seeking individuals can expect the cooperation of their contacts who can access and share information more readily, even if that information is limited in nature (Granovetter 1973, 1983; Drever and Hoffmeister 2008). These strong ties, however, are not unproblematic; although all individuals depend on strong network ties to a certain extent, data point to individuals with low levels of human capital as those most likely to rely on strong ties, thus putting them at a disadvantage within the labor market where mobility depends on having access to information different to the one we are most likely to receive. Thus, while strong network ties serve the purpose of connecting job-seeking individuals to jobs they urgently need, it is weak network ties that, when actively mobilized can afford an individual advancement within the labor market. Of course, in order to effectively access mobility within the labor market, it is imperative that these weak network ties be vertical in nature as horizontal weak ties are not necessarily useful (Granovetter 1983).

In new immigrant destinations, particularly those with thriving economies, there is an increased demand for immigrants who are willing to perform jobs in the low-wage sector (Blue and Drever 2011). While social networks play an important role in the process of hiring, immigrants can also readily access these jobs through more formal recruitment channels that do not necessarily rely on immigrants' strong ties. In contrast, employment prospects for immigrants in economically weak new destinations are scarce, and access to social networks might prove to be even more important. The absence of a thriving and open labor market means that there are less available jobs that immigrants can apply for and they might depend more highly on the help their family members, friends, and co-ethnics can provide. For instance, in the USA, Waldinger (1996a, b) found that Latinos with low levels of human capital were less susceptible to the negative impacts of economic restructuring thanks to their networks. In Germany, Drever and Hoffmeister (2008) have found that despite job scarcity and tight labor market regulations, immigrants rely heavily on social networks, especially those with lower levels of educational attainment and without German friends or acquaintances as part of their inner circle. In contrast, to date, no research has been conducted on how the strength of the local economy affects—if at all—immigrants' need for social networks and how it might affect the relative importance of strong versus weak ties for immigrant job seekers. As has been discussed by Menjivar (1993, 2000), social networks do not work independently of larger structural factors and each immigrant group faces a specific set of structural factors in the receiving society that will determine the type and form of support they will receive. If context of reception, such as the strength of the

local economy directly influences the feasibility of immigrant social networks, then an unfavorable local economy will mean that immigrants have fewer resources with which to help one another and these resources will be carefully guarded. Examining this question will allow us to better understand how immigrants access and construct social networks post migration in new destinations as well as the role that strong and weak ties play in immigrants' economic incorporation.

Economic Fluctuations and the Settlement of Hispanic Immigrants

Understanding the economic developments that the cities of Newburgh and Poughkeepsie underwent permits a better understanding of the economic incorporation of Hispanic immigrants. Hispanic migration—especially Mexican migration—to the Hudson Valley in New York State has been perceived as a new phenomenon to the casual observer. However, Mexican immigrants have been working in the Hudson Valley since the 1970s. Initially, Hispanic immigrants in the Hudson Valley came to work in area farms picking and packing fruits and vegetables—mainly apples—and later on moved into more stable and less rural jobs such as manufacturing, construction, and restaurant jobs, among others. In cities such as Newburgh and Poughkeepsie, initial immigrants discovered the availability of low-skilled jobs and informed relatives in their country of origin, thus initiating a small but steady stream of immigration that has grown rapidly throughout the years—and supplying a needed labor force to the area.

During this initial immigration in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Newburgh and Poughkeepsie could be said to be in a state of flux, economically speaking. Of the two cities, Poughkeepsie appears to have had a stronger economic base, representing an important commercial and industrial hub in the Mid-Hudson Valley area. The presence of De Laval Industries and IBM in the area, along with both companies' wartime projects—they made rifles, cylinders for gun barrels, bombing navigational systems etc.—gave the city of Poughkeepsie considerable importance and increased employment during the 1940s (Flad and Griffen 2009). Moreover, other manufacturing companies as well as area hospitals and colleges provided enough employment for residents of Poughkeepsie and adjacent towns. Despite its thriving economy, Poughkeepsie's downtown commercial district was struggling by the mid-1970s due to increasing commercial activity in suburban areas (i.e., malls) and city officials were scrambling to maintain the districts strength. The 1980s continued to represent an economic upswing for the city; however, by the early 1990s, Poughkeepsie was undergoing a severe economic decline as IBM cut thousands of jobs and other companies left the area altogether, in part due to trends in outsourcing. Thus, Poughkeepsie had a very limited economic base and was in the midst of trying to reverse years of economic decline. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, Poughkeepsie was recuperating due to a more diversified economy in the form of small businesses, in which immigrants were a significant component (Flad and Griffen 2009).

As mentioned earlier, Hispanic immigrants initially came to work in agriculture and later moved into other industries, principally manufacturing. As the immigrant population continued to grow, the commercial landscape of the city's downtown area was renewed through the new ethnic community. What was once a deteriorated and largely boarded up commercial district that city officials were unable to revitalize was re-

emerging in the 1990s through “an aspiring entrepreneurial class” that established restaurants, food markets, and other businesses that catered to the growing population (Flad and Griffen 2009).

Unlike Poughkeepsie, Newburgh has been in economic turmoil for more than three decades. A thriving city during the first half of the twentieth century, the city saw its economy decline after World War II due to a number of factors such as industrial decline and suburban growth, among others (Eisenstadt and Moss 2005). Almost immediately after the war, many of the manufacturing industries in Newburgh either went out of business or began relocating to the South, leaving behind many unemployed residents. During the 1960s, the city of Newburgh experienced the decline of its retail sector as shopping malls opened in the outskirts of the city. Moreover, during this period and well into the 1970s, the city of Newburgh experienced racial tensions as a result of the way in which the city manager was handling welfare policies and his attacks on the black population. The city of Newburgh continued to lose factory jobs during the 1970s and 1980s; the amount of vacant housing increased, and urban renewal projects had disastrous results. During the 1990s, Newburgh began to see some improvement in its economy, as the real estate business experienced a boom and brought back some retail and residential development back to the city’s waterfront area. Part of the improvement can also be attributed to the dozens of businesses that have been opened by the city’s Hispanic immigrant population, which are reinvigorating the ailing downtown economy. As in Poughkeepsie and other cities around the USA, Hispanic immigrants have opened small supermarkets, restaurants, bakeries, and even taxi companies that cater to the Hispanic population and employ co-ethnics. However, despite the small economic improvements, the city of Newburgh is still struggling with high levels of unemployment, underemployment, depressed wages, and poverty, which stem “from the labor market conditions including out migration of employers and the limited skill base of the city’s workforce” (United States Department of Housing and Development. 2005: 25). Moreover, although some urban manufacturing companies still remain—Atlas Textile, Concept Packaging, Christmas in America, etc.—Newburgh is at a disadvantage with such a limited economic base and an infrastructure that provides few to no opportunities for large scale manufacturing or centralized service businesses. Although like Poughkeepsie, Newburgh is seeking to revitalize and diversify its economy to include retail, professional service businesses and so forth, it has not yet implemented the necessary work force support systems—which exist in Poughkeepsie—that would enable it to do so (i.e., job training and readiness programs, workshops on entrepreneurial opportunities, etc.). The lack of an effective transportation system that can connect the local workforce to area employers further complicates matters; even though individuals might have the skills and willingness to work, if they lack transportation, they are unable to hold down a job. Thus, Newburgh’s economic plight affects the economic incorporation of the immigrant population, as there are very few employment options that can offer prospects for mobility.

Despite somewhat different economic trajectories, both Newburgh and Poughkeepsie are examples of small cities that despite their weak economic base have become immigrant destinations. Therefore, they provide an apt case study for examining how—if at all—a weak economic base affects the need for social networks, especially strong versus weak ties. In the next section, I discuss the methodological approach followed by an examination of the role of social networks in facilitating or hindering their (immigrants) insertion into the local economy.

Data and Methods

Approximately 45 in-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted with Hispanic immigrants, 25 in Newburgh and 20 in Poughkeepsie. The interviews cover a number of topics such as immigration experience, language, educational attainment, work experience, household information, social relations, discrimination, religion, and remittances. The interviews lasted between 1 h and a half to 2 h and were all conducted in Spanish as well as transcribed and translated by me. The participants were selected through purposive sampling, but to ensure that different sectors of the immigrant population were included, contacts were established with various religious and community organizations that provide services to the immigrant population. Furthermore, as a selection criterion, only immigrants who were 18 years of age or older and had been in the Hudson Valley area for at least 6 months were selected for an interview. Additionally, only one member per household was selected; however, relatives who did not live in the same household were eligible. It should be noted that these interviews form part of a broader project on new immigrants to the Hudson Valley in New York State.

The interviews included respondents from a variety of occupations, including construction, landscaping, domestic service, and manufacturing. Among those interviewed, Mexico was the most common origin: 17 of the respondents in Newburgh and 16 of those in Poughkeepsie were from Mexico. However, they were not from the same parts of Mexico: interviewees in Newburgh tend to be from the Puebla region of Mexico, while those in Poughkeepsie from Oaxaca. The lack of similarity in origins is surprising given that the two cities are only about half an hour and less than 20 miles apart. Aside from Mexico, the other countries represented were Honduras, Guatemala, and Argentina. Moreover, the majority of respondents had been living in the USA for less than 10 years. With regard to age, the median age in Newburgh was 36, while in Poughkeepsie, it was close to 40.

Job-Seeking Immigrants and the Importance of Social Networks

Despite having similar demographic and human capital profiles, the economic incorporation for Hispanic immigrants in these cities differs. As other researchers have documented, the incorporation of immigrants depends on a number of factors, such as the characteristics of the arriving group, context of reception, existence of a co-ethnic community that can aid in the incorporation, as well as the economic situation and local opportunities of the city in which immigrants are settling (Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Zúñiga and Hernández-León 2005). As I have already stated above, the economic situation and availability of local opportunities differed somewhat between the cities, with Newburgh enveloped in a more pressing ailing economy, the product of a multiplicity of factors. But, to what extent do Hispanic immigrants in these cities depend on social networks in order to find employment? Do they depend more on strong or weak network ties?

In general, and as exemplified below with the case of Lucio from Poughkeepsie, most immigrants interviewed for this project relied on some form of social networks to find employment. “How did I find my job? Wow, when I arrived to Poughkeepsie my

wife's brother and his family was already here so he found me a job at the place where he works. I was lucky not to have to go searching. Two weeks after I arrived I was working, thank God." These networks varied from strong network ties in the form of family members and/or friends passing along information regarding employment opportunities to weak network ties, whereby job-seeking immigrants relied on the help of acquaintances and intermediary/brokers.

Researchers (Donato et al. 2005; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Massey et al. 1987) have documented the role of the co-ethnic community in facilitating the incorporation of immigrants by helping them find housing, food, and especially employment. Helping recently arrived co-ethnics find and secure a job has led to the formation of an internal hiring network that has facilitated employment not only for immigrants but also for employers. On the one hand, immigrant network ties provide a link between "labor supply and demand in a local labor market" (Wilson 1999). On the other, employers benefit greatly from this form of internal hiring as it reduces the time and cost related to external hiring, in addition to securing a desired type of employee. Longer established immigrants are aware of any vacancies at the work place and thus able to refer friends or relatives to their employer, supplying the latter with a secure workforce. In this sense, employment opportunities in Newburgh and Poughkeepsie are similar as groups in both cities rely on network ties. The majority of respondents in the study—more so in Newburgh than Poughkeepsie—admitted to obtaining their job through the help of a friend or relative who was already in the workplace or had previously worked there but still maintained "connections." Andrés, a Mexican immigrant from Zaachila, who now resides in Poughkeepsie, talks in depth about how his strong network ties helped him land a job and how he in turn helped other family members:

I found my job in landscaping thanks to a friend from my town. He knew that I had a degree in agronomy and he told me that his boss was looking for someone, so he referred me and I immediately got the job. Within a year they had fixed my papers so that I could stay through a work visa. Now my brother also works with me. My boss needed a new employee and he asked me if I knew of anyone responsible and capable of doing the job without much supervision. And, in the same way that I brought my brother, others have done the same, bringing brothers, cousins or close friends. If they know you are a good worker they will trust in who you recommend because you would not recommend someone who is not a good employee because you could lose your job.

Andrés' comment sums up how the majority of job-seeking Hispanic immigrants in the sample from Newburgh and Poughkeepsie have found employment and the importance of referrals for both employee and employer. In these cities where immigrant-gearred community organizations are lacking—and where they exist they are resource poor—the channels of information are circumscribed to the informal networks of friends and family. However, in a weak labor market, providing information might not be enough and in order for these channels of information to work in securing employment for job-seeking immigrants, they must be tied to referrals, which entails a level of responsibility and is more costly to obtain (Granovetter 1995; Menjívar 2000).

Aside from relying on co-ethnic networks, some Hispanic immigrants in Poughkeepsie were recruited directly in their home countries by employers, albeit with the referral of a friend or relative already working for the employer in Poughkeepsie. Because their employers are formally recruiting them, they come with the security that a legal status affords them through the H2B visa program for temporary non-agricultural workers. This program allocates approximately 66,000 visa work permits a year, and in Poughkeepsie, it seems that the landscaping industry is one of a few—if not the only—industries taking advantage of the program.

Despite the large number of interviewees who made use of these social networks, some mentioned finding their jobs (albeit their second and successive jobs) through newspaper classifieds and postings in local supermarkets:

I had friends here (Poughkeepsie) and I got my first job through them. I lasted about a year and then I decided I needed to move on... The second job I got on my own. I started looking in the newspaper, the flyers in the supermarket, everything...it wasn't that difficult to find; there are some jobs around here. (Marcial, Oaxaca)

It is important to note that although all interviewees relied on strong or weak network ties to find initial employment, only in Poughkeepsie did respondents assert that after their initial job, they did not have to rely exclusively on their network ties. This finding points to the somewhat broader availability of employment opportunities and slightly better economic situation in Poughkeepsie vis-à-vis Newburgh, such that immigrants are not confined to relying exclusively on their informal ties with friends and relatives. Between the years 2005 and 2007, approximately the period when this research took place, Poughkeepsie's unemployment rate was 8.6 %, 2 % above the national average but well below Newburgh's 11.5 % unemployment. Moreover, Poughkeepsie's poverty rate was significantly lower than Newburgh with 19.7 versus 28.4 %, respectively (American Community Survey 2007).

However, in cities like Newburgh, with such limited employment opportunities and high unemployment rates, being able to rely on co-ethnic networks greatly facilitated finding a job.

God, I don't know what I would have done without my family. They were the ones who helped me find a job. But I thought it was going to be different, you know. I thought, I'll arrive in Newburgh and I'll start working quickly. But no, I was completely wrong...you know how long it took them to get me a job? Like 5 weeks! Friends who had been in California told me they found jobs as soon as they arrived and I thought that would be the case here...but things are bad here, really bad...

Immigrants who relied heavily on either strong or weak network ties to find employment reported having to do so because of the scarcity of employment opportunities; this was mainly the case in Newburgh. For instance, Octavio, a recently arrived Mexican immigrant from Puebla, spoke about the difficulties in trying to find a job on his own. Unfortunately, his lack of network ties along with the city's constricted labor market, his poor English proficiency, and his immigration status made it impossible for

him to find steady employment. In his struggle for employment, he was forced to resort to his final and perhaps most precarious option, that of a day laborer, which in Newburgh only afforded very sporadic work.

I arrived in Newburgh because there were people from my hometown here, but they were not my family or friends. I was told you could find work here... but I have had a very hard time finding a job... there are hardly any jobs here; Newburgh is a very poor city with no jobs. I think that if you have family or good friends then it is easier, they connect you, you know. They look out for you. I just need someone to lend me a hand and give me a referral.

Octavio's comments underscore the fact that sharing a common background is not enough to generate networks that are both close-knit and sustaining. And, although research (Menjivar 2000) has demonstrated that strong ties such as those of family and/or friends are complex and cannot be seen as a constant reliable source of support, in a weak labor market these ties are seen as the only viable option. Other respondents also spoke of the difficulties confronted when attempting to find a job without the use of social networks or other co-ethnic resources in Newburgh's highly constricted labor market. Mercedes, a young woman from Oaxaca, spoke of her labor market experience after having a disagreement with the family she came to live with and work for in the USA:

My uncles arranged for me to come. I didn't know anyone in Newburgh. The people who brought me here were friends of one of my uncles but I had never met them... My uncle's friends gave me a job and also rented me a room in their house. However, things did not work out so I started looking for another job. It was extremely hard to find something. There are hardly any jobs in Newburgh. I went to the few factories in the area, looked in newspapers, the bulletin boards in the supermarket, and nothing. What is worse is that my uncle's friends refused to help me and I knew they could help me because they were helping other relatives. So it took me months before I found a job because I didn't know anyone on the inside.

Contrary to Octavio, Mercedes initially had the benefit of having access to weak ties that eased her initial process of incorporation by providing her with housing and employment. Nonetheless, these ties were not unproblematic. Social networks are complex and can be imbued with conflict; therefore, network ties that at one time were fruitful might not be so at other points due to a multiplicity of factors, such as scarce labor market opportunities, harsh immigration laws, and a resource-poor community (Menjivar 2000).

These accounts point to the importance of social networks—more specifically, strong ties—in the labor market incorporation of immigrants in both cities and the difficulties of finding employment without access to these ethnic resources. Granovetter (1983, p. 213) notes that individuals encapsulated within the tight bonds of strong ties are likely to “lose some of the advantages associated with the outreach of weak ties.” However, my data present and I argue that in economically weak new destinations, with few employment opportunities, immigrants are better served by the networks they can access and construct through their co-ethnics than through no networks at all. Taking into consideration how the recruiting process takes place within these new destinations,

immigrant's abilities to access and/or construct strong ties become more significant and important to their overall economic incorporation. These strong networks should be seen then, not only as a means of helping immigrants get by but as perhaps the only way of achieving economic incorporation in an economically unfavorable context of reception. Moreover, despite the limits placed on these networks due to larger socio-economic factors, immigrants are reshaping their responses to better provide job assistance. For instance, while providing information about employment opportunities is extremely valuable within the immigrant community and can take place through strong or weak network ties, findings from this study point to the careful guarding of information that is reserved for the closest family members. Zenaida, a Newburgh resident originally from the state of Puebla, Mexico, says:

Trying to find a job in Newburgh is perhaps the most difficult thing an immigrant has to do. Just look around, there are no jobs here; very, very little. So what do you do? *Tu velas por los tuyos*... (you look after your own). When I hear there is going to be an opening I immediately tell whoever is looking for a job in my family and of course, I recommend them. You have to, otherwise they won't get the job if they go on their own...

Zenaida's account provides evidence to how important strong networks are in a place such as Newburgh, to the point that immigrants reserve information about scarce employment opportunities for their closest family members. Of course, it is evident that information regarding employment opportunities is circulating throughout the immigrant community, but because jobs are scarce and employers rely heavily on referrals, those who are part of a strong network are significantly more likely to benefit than those who are either unaided by networks or rely exclusively on the transmission of information through weak network ties.

A couple of respondents in Newburgh even mentioned their intention of returning to their country of origin because of what they considered a prolonged period of unemployment or underemployment and inability to establish connections with employers and co-ethnics:

I had no money; not one cent. I had no work and on top of that I had been robbed. All I wanted was to go back home. But I couldn't even do that. Then I met Leopoldo (immigrant community organizer) and he told me not to leave, that I shouldn't let defeat overcome me and that he would help me find a job. (Catalino, from Puebla, México)

Of course I wanted to leave, but where to? And with what money? I couldn't go back to Mexico because my family needed me here... New York City? Uhm, It's too expensive there and even though I think I have better chances of finding a job I wouldn't be able to make it on my own. I know I struggle a lot here but at least I know that whatever little money I can make here and there I can always scrape by. (Claudio, from Puebla, México)

Despite the existence of a co-ethnic community that literature has said can provide protection from economic difficulties—at least initially—immigrants settling in weak

economic destinations who are devoid of strong and weak ties are forced to confront the host labor market unaided (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). Without access to these social networks, Hispanic immigrants, especially in Newburgh, struggle immensely to find a job, and thus, their overall process of socioeconomic incorporation is hindered. Moreover, these accounts also underscore the economic differences that exist between new immigrant destinations. New immigrant destinations cannot be seen as homogeneous places that necessarily offer better economic opportunities for immigrants settling in them. It is important to account for these differences in order to better understand how immigrants are being incorporated and to what extent they must rely on social networks and other ethnic resources.

Notwithstanding the important role social networks and internal hiring practices play in both Newburgh and Poughkeepsie, certain aspects of the process vary and are worth mentioning. First, and perhaps most important of all, is the mechanisms for hiring used by employers. Certain employers (i.e., landscaping) in Poughkeepsie often times prepared the necessary paper work (i.e., visa) in order to hire employees legally, which in turn provided immigrants with a certain level of security—fairer wages, legal venues through which they could report grievances, etc. This security was not afforded to their counterparts in Newburgh, who for the most part are (1) working without legal documents, which in a labor scarce economy further reduces their employment opportunities; (2) less likely to report grievances; or (3) ask for an increment in wages for fear of being fired. Second, Hispanics in Newburgh rely a great deal on their network ties—especially strong ties—for finding employment. Without the help of family or friends, it was almost impossible for immigrants to secure a job and many believe the difficulty in finding a job also has to do with the lack of employment opportunities in Newburgh. As Rufino, a Mexican immigrant from Puebla puts it:

Jobs are very scarce in Newburgh, so when family or friends learn about a vacancy, they will immediately relay that information to their loved ones. So, if you're not a part of that circle of information your chances of finding a job are very, very small. It's not like in New York City or Los Angeles where jobs are plenty, you know. In these places our work is needed and there are many opportunities. If you don't have friends or family you can rely on that is not a big problem because you can still find a job on your own. Here, the story is very different.

Rufino's argument regarding the exclusion of those outside a given social network is particularly salient in the case of Newburgh and underscores the pivotal role social networks and ethnic resources play in facilitating immigrants' access to employment (Aguilera and Massey 2003; Waldinger and Lichter 2003; Pfeffer and Parra 2009). In economically depressed cities such as Newburgh and Poughkeepsie—and more so in Newburgh—it appears that weak labor demands not only limit employment opportunities but also make it imperative for immigrants to have access to a network of co-ethnic resources if they are to succeed in a city with such dim labor market prospects.

The significance of strong ties in Newburgh was manifested as well through the one-time employee referral bonuses established by a local candy factory. Several Hispanic immigrant workers in Newburgh reported obtaining cash bonuses from their employer when they successfully referred someone. According to respondents such as

Guadalupe, from Puebla, Mexico, these cash bonuses were given when the company decided to expand operations for an upcoming holiday and were in need of workers:

...the manager told us that they were going to hire more people and he asked us if we knew people who were looking for work. I told him that my husband's cousins were looking for work. I was in shock when he said he would give us money if we could refer someone to the factory... They gave us \$50... Do you know what that meant for us? I mean, the incentive was great to have... but more than that was being able to get jobs for our loved ones who were in desperate need of jobs.

Although these cash bonuses were a one-time incentive given by one particular factory in order to recruit new employees to fill positions for its seasonally expanded factory operations, it denotes: (1) the reliance—and preference—of employers in Newburgh on an immigrant labor force and (2) how immigrants immediately activate their strong ties in order to connect their relatives and friends with employment in a city that only has a dearth of jobs.

While strong ties appear to be the main form of finding employment in these cities, weak ties also played a role in connecting job-seeking immigrants with area employers. Initially, Leopoldo, a Newburgh community activist, emerged as a key social actor who helped Hispanic residents resolve housing issues and understand their rights as tenants, connected immigrants with area lawyers who could help them with their immigration cases, and referred immigrants to local religious organizations that could provide help with obtaining food and clothes. As Leopoldo became better known not only among co-ethnics but also among non-Hispanics, employers began contacting him and asking for his help in recruiting workers. Thus, Leopoldo's weak social ties to the wider Newburgh and adjacent communities became a resource for the immigrant community, whereby he linked employers and Hispanics through the development of a meticulous system in which he matched workers to employers. This was achieved by keeping a database with a file of each person looking for employment along with his or her skills and previous work experience. Furthermore, he negotiated wages and transportation for the workers as well as helped them fill out the necessary paperwork. While Leopoldo is not necessarily a better resource to the network ties of friends and relatives, he does represent an alternative for job-seeking immigrants and for some, the only avenue of finding a job in Newburgh's constricted labor market. Leopoldo's work is very similar to that of labor market brokers/intermediaries—as well as the *raitero* system in place in Chicago—that connect immigrants to jobs in the local economy and make profits from the companies and the immigrants themselves (Grabell 2013). However, contrary to labor market brokers/intermediaries, Leopoldo does not generate a profit from deducting fees from job-seeking immigrants but rather from the companies who hire the immigrants. Moreover, unlike the exploitation and vulnerability that many immigrants face when entering into these relationships of labor brokering due to their lack of English proficiency and knowledge of their rights among other factors, Leopoldo visualizes himself and his work first and foremost as that of an activist (Donato et al. 2005). For instance, Leopoldo always kept a close watch on how workers were being treated and intervened when workers were being mistreated or were not being paid for work performed. According to Leopoldo:

My job is to make sure that they get decent jobs that will pay them enough to make a living. The companies contact me and I make sure, before I make the connection, that the work is suitable. Sometimes they want people for only a couple of months but other times they want them as regular employees. So far it has gone well, although there have been cases of employers not wanting to pay wages and then I intervene and make sure they are paid.

The importance of these social actors, however, is not solely based on their ability to help immigrants find jobs but also in the awareness they create in immigrants regarding their rights in the workplace, housing, and how and where to obtain needed services. Such networks serve to ease the economic and social incorporation of newly arrived immigrants and can be even more important in newly established immigrant destinations with weak economies. Unlike Newburgh, respondents in Poughkeepsie said they knew of no organization that helped immigrants in finding jobs and were more likely to find employment at one point or another without the help of a friend or relative. It could well be the case that the types of jobs available for Hispanic immigrants in Poughkeepsie (1) rely on a much smaller workforce that is not conducive to the type of internal hiring processes seen in Newburgh or (2) that the labor market in the city of Poughkeepsie is not as constricted as that of Newburgh's, and thus, immigrants do not have to rely exclusively on their social networks in order to find employment.

Conclusion

Much has been said regarding the importance of context of reception for the overall incorporation of newly arrived immigrants. Nonetheless, with very few exceptions, the literature has failed to acknowledge that social networks are complex structures that change according to political and economic factors in the receiving community as well as the social resources immigrants have at their disposal.

The data presented here reiterates how network ties—particularly strong ties—play a role in the economic incorporation of Hispanic immigrants, which is qualitatively different depending on the strength of the local economy. This is not to say that levels of human capital are not important, but to the extent that immigrants are settling in economically weak destinations with a constricted labor market that offers very few employment opportunities, the existence of network ties and their type seems to be a stronger predictor of economic incorporation.

The economically weak context of reception that immigrants in the cities of Newburgh and Poughkeepsie encountered along with a constricted labor market, with scarce employment opportunities, made it imperative for job-seeking immigrants to rely almost entirely on strong network ties in order to secure employment. This does not necessarily imply that social networks are more important in these cities in comparison to other immigrant destinations but they were nonetheless determinant in their insertion into the local labor market. The scarcity of employment opportunities and reliance on network ties also means that there is a limitation in terms of how many people and who can benefit from these networks as more established immigrants carefully guard employment information and their influence for their closest family members. For immigrants without access to the strong networks of family and friends

or even the weak networks established with a local immigrant activist/broker, entering the labor market unaided proved to be an arduous task that left them in an even more precarious situation.

To clarify, while Newburgh and Poughkeepsie share some similarities—i.e., weak economies—Poughkeepsie's investment in urban core revitalization programs such as the arts and historic preservation have led to an economic growth that is evidenced by increased employment opportunities in the construction and service sector (Flad and Griffen 2009). Thus, immigrants do not have to rely exclusively on their network ties to find employment. However, it remains to be seen whether these urban renewal projects will have a lasting effect in terms of employment opportunities and job-seeking immigrants' ability to find jobs unaided by their strong networks.

Finally, it should be noted that while this research highlights the role of social networks in two economically depressed new immigrant destinations, we cannot make any broad claims. It is necessary to undertake further research on the role social networks play in the labor market incorporation of immigrants who settle in economically depressed cities. Moreover, this research took place before the 2008 recession and questions emerge regarding the importance of networks in these cities during a national economic downturn.

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